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The New Song
✠ in Heaven ✠



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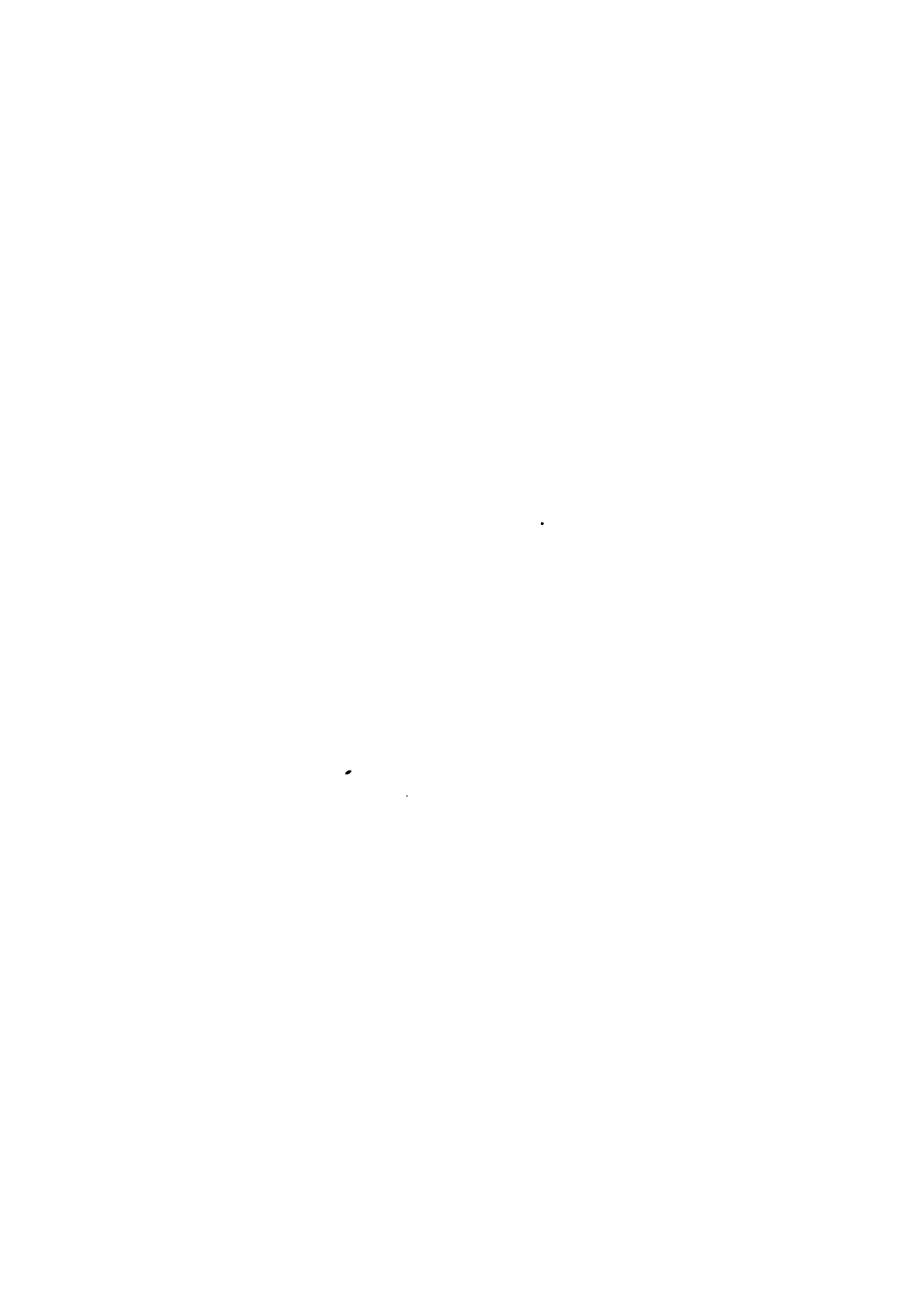
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Theodore Jewett Eastman

A.B. 1901 - M.D. 1905

1931





For dear King
with love
and all best wishes

June eighteenth

1909

C. C. G.

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THE NEW SONG IN HEAVEN

**THE NEW SONG
IN HEAVEN**

**BY THE
RIGHT REV.
PHILLIPS BROOKS, D.D.**

**LATE BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE
OF MASSACHUSETTS**

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THE NEW SONG IN HEAVEN

*And they sang as it were a new song
before the throne. — REV. xiv. 3.*

SAINT John does not tell us what the song was that he heard in his vision, but only that it was "a new song," which no man could learn but the four hundred and forty and four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth. He was not yet one of those redeemed and glorified himself, therefore even he could not learn the song. It came to him out of a higher region, and while he felt its sublimity and beauty he could not fully understand it. It was in heaven and he was on earth, and so he could only know of it that it was "a new song" and that much of it was

past his comprehension and recital. He must have felt about it as we sometimes feel with regard to nature. Are there not with all of us times when we love nature most and are most in harmony with her, and yet feel that all her notes, her winds, her buds and streams and waving trees, have meanings that we do not fathom, are a new song before the throne of God which we vaguely love but cannot learn?

Some of our best inspirations and helps come to us from such songs above us. We hear their music, we discern their spirit, but their exact sense is hid from us. The character of St. John's vision seems to be repeated in every exaltation that we gather from the life and character of any fellow-being

which fills us with admiration and a desire to imitate it, while the law and method under which it is lived is too high for us to reach. The ambitions of the best minds, the self-sacrifices of the best martyrs, the prayers and ascriptions of the best saints, perhaps more than all the purity of the purest childhood, —with each of these we live, continually listening to the song that it is singing before God's throne. I say, especially with children, for there is nothing that reproduces the celestial harmony upon our uncelestial earth so nearly as their lives do: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." In the unworldliness, the ready affection, the pure tastes, the impulsive faith, the fresh, hopeful enthusiasm of the truest child,

where is the man, past his own childhood, who does not hear a music that from day to day enchains his love and mocks his comprehension?

And so it seems to be with every man's life who is led into any higher devotion or holiness than his fellowmen. His acts and words become songs that they hear in visions, and that tempt them on to where he is. I feel about any one of our soldiers who lived and died as bravely and purely as the best of them did, that, much as I love to think of him, I do not comprehend him. I could not unless I had been what he was. I feel that his life sang a song of duty before the throne, which none can learn but they who have been re-

deemed with him into the same great privilege and glory.

So when you and I listen to the words or watch the lives of the noblest servants of God, when we read Wesley's hymns or Robertson's sermons, when we live with Franke in his Orphan House, or walk with Mrs. Fry through the prisons and lunatic asylums, the nearer we draw to them the more we feel how largely their lives are incomprehensible to us, for the like can only thoroughly know its like. Their words and works come to us like songs from far above. Or have you never felt,—when you have heard a holy man's thanks to God for a day which outwardly you and he had lived alike, when you marvelled at the

richness which he had gathered out of what seemed to you dry and dead fields, — have you never felt that you were listening to a song which it was hopeless to try to learn till you had learned first the spiritual condition out of which it sprang ?

Alas for the man who does not feel something above him always, towards whose comprehension he is always struggling! Alas for him who is not every day striving for the comprehension of some new song! For every true song must be a new one. We cannot praise God rightly in the mere crooning over of old liturgies, into whose barred and narrow doors no new meaning ever intrudes. Not that the words need to be always new,

but the psalm or prayer must always be. Have you never felt as you came into church some special Sunday, shrouded with some special sorrow, or jubilant with some new joy, that some of these old prayers and thanksgivings became as new to you as if you had never heard them before?—the prayer for a sick person, for a family in affliction, the litany or the general thanksgiving, or, most of all, that wonderful group of petitions as new and old at once as human need, the Lord's Prayer?

Look at the Psalms: three different times David begins a psalm with, "O sing unto the Lord a new song." Another time it is, "I will sing a new song unto thee, O God;" and when one of his

greatest deliverances had come to him, he who had praised God a thousand times before cried, "He hath put a new song into my mouth, even praise unto our God." All praise was new to him. Each reached a little higher, and shaped the old familiar gratitude into new forms.

So may it be with us. As we learn more of God, as Christ grows dearer to us, as we learn some new application of His infinite helpfulness to our infinite need from day to day, as always growing humbler we grow always richer, and always more conscious of weakness become more strong, may each new thanksgiving take a deeper depth and reach a higher height than any that has gone

before it. He is not the Christian that he ought to be who, with no increase of insight or earnestness, prays the same prayer or offers the same praise twice. The need recurs, but in the meantime the needy soul ought to have learnt more of what it is for such as it to ask of such as God. Always a new song before the throne then! There was one unlearnt last night which perhaps our souls may sing this evening, and so go on from learnt to unlearnt continually, till at last we are ready for the great "new song" which only they can sing whose redemption is complete.

Now let us look at this promised new song. We have seen that no man can learn it yet; still, we may

know something about it, for it is to be the song of the redeemed. The condition of learning it is to be this—that a soul shall be “redeemed from the earth.” The song, then, must be the flower of the perfected redemption. It must be the triumph of the complete work of Christ. And so we can tell what will be some, at least, of the elements that make it up.

First, there will be in it the saint's pure joy in the Savior's glory. In the condition of sainthood that will come first. The soul will rejoice for Christ before it rejoices for itself. The first use it makes of its crown will be to cast it at His feet. It will test its harp by striking it to His praise. As the first joy of the successful

child is that the father will be pleased, of the successful scholar that the teacher will be honored, of the successful soldier that his country will be saved, so the saved Christian's first delight is not, as we are sometimes told, to find that he is safe, but to know that Christ has triumphed and is glorified.

And what will that glorification be? The ends of the earth shall have been gathered in. The enemies shall all have been subdued. Peace will brood like a great, deep, loving atmosphere over a whole harmonized creation. The plans of Eternity will be accomplished. The rounded and finished purposes of that wonderful Life and Death shall be all returned and held fast in the Savior's hands. His work

shall not have returned unto Him void, but shall have prospered to complete success in the thing whereto He sent it.

On all this, no doubt, the redeemed soul will look with joy. Over all this triumph he will lift an exultant song. But, when with his new insight he looks for the first time clearly into his own nature, is it not reasonable to think that there he will see a glorification of his Lord's redemption which will be more interesting and inspiring to him than all the rest? We do not understand the glory of redemption now, because we do not fully know this human nature which is being redeemed. We do not know Christ because we do not fully know ourselves; just as he who

did not know anything about the boys it was intended to train, could form but a very poor idea of any teacher's system of education.

But let the redeemed man fully understand himself. Let him trace the working of each noble power which, clogged once by sin, has been again freed to action. Let him see how noble and great man, in his first idea and in his restoration, is. Let him discern the delicate adjustments, the patient endurances, the mighty impulses, by which that restoration has been brought about; and he himself, redeemed Man, as he stands there in his humility, will seem to himself the noblest and most glorious trophy of the whole. Out of the new Creature, at wonder before

itself, will spring the new song ; and a part of it at least will be, "Thou art worthy, for Thou hast redeemed me."

Whatever prodigies of power may come from other worlds to bow before the Throne we do not know, but this at least will be there. I welcome every new enterprise of science which, in these days, is discovering both in the body and the mind of man the grandeur of the ground-plan of humanity. It all seems to me to be getting ready the materials for the new song. Men may not use it so now. They may feed their human vanity and pride upon it ; but the final use of it must be different. The moral condition of man—his corruption and unspirituality and sin—no science

can extenuate or deny. That makes redemption necessary, no matter what perfection there may be in the physical and mental natures within which this sin runs riot. But the sin once cast out, redemption once achieved, then let man find himself as noble as he may; let every science come to tell him of his kingliness. Every new glory of his nature is a new glory of Him who first made and now has harmonized and renewed that nature. Every new crown that his increasing knowledge puts on the renewed man's head, goes in a moment to the Savior's feet. You cannot exalt man too much, if it is only always the Redeemed man that you magnify; for to exalt the redeemed is to exalt not him but his Re-

deemer, and so to swell the great "new song."

Behind this joy in Christ's triumph there will come, as the second element in the new song, the soul's own joy in victory and finished struggle. That will follow after Christ is praised, or, rather, will melt in with the soul's rejoicing in Christ's joy. And remember what the true Christian expects when he looks forward to heaven as a place where struggle will be over. It is not that aspiration is to cease, not that labor will be done; it is only that aspiration and labor will be freed from uncertainty, and furnished with sure standing points from which to work. The victory of the Christian's eternity must be this — that when he reaches after

new truth there he will be certain of attaining it; when he attains it, he will grasp and hold it perfectly; when he sets out in any new work (for we can form no attractive and worthy idea of heaven that does not dower and fill it full of work for God), his eager hands will not be weakened, as they are continually here, by two doubts: first, whether the thing ought to be done; and, second, whether there is any use in his trying to do it. This only will be the difference, but how immense this difference is! Put this certainty into the best part of human labor, and you have almost made heaven. You have cut the weights from wings of energy that at once spread themselves broad against the sky, and sweep upward

to flights they never have dreamed of.

True, this uncertainty cannot be safely taken away now. We see its use. We see how faith and patience and trust are fed upon it. But there, in heaven, when the new supply of God's personal presence is provided, when the immediate sight of Him becomes the source of trust and faith and patience, then uncertainty may safely sweep away; and, standing on the limits of the new life, all ready to leap into the glorious atmosphere of certain truth and unhindered duty, the soul will look back upon struggle and distrust, and sing its new song before the throne.

So far as we may know it, this will be the difference between work

and growth in heaven and work and growth on earth. It will not be a new nature, but the old nature freed from every incumbrance and incited by every help. It will not be a new plant that blooms in the Lord's garden, but the old plant,—the same humanity, transplanted from wilderness to garden, freed from tangling undergrowths, with light let in upon its darkness, with a new soil about its roots. The clear perception of this truth makes heaven more soberly but more truly beautiful to us than any glowing pictures of angelic being that our fancy paints, and gives us a higher and truer keynote for the new song.

Think of it just in one point only. Picture a soul that long and patiently has studied and struggled

and stumbled after truth, a soul whose one longing while it lived on earth was to get the real apart from the unreal, and see it in its pure beauty. Suppose that soul has crossed the line. It has entered within the veil. It has gone to God, and in Him, lo! the long-sought miracle is done. As it looks back, truth falls into harmony, and doubt, separating itself from the substance of which it seemed a part, like mist off from a morning landscape, lifts and floats away. Bits of truth which have not fitted together, by some strange, simple impulse, quietly turn their right edges to each other and join into one perfect piece. Unvalued pieces that the soul has swept aside into a corner come out and take their

places in the very centre, and are found to have a magnet-power about which all the others group themselves at once. Other pieces that it tried to make much of, and force into central places where they did not belong (some of our darling doctrines, it may be), drift out of sight like the big chaff from among the little grain upon the barn floor as the wind sweeps over it. There, just across the threshold, just before the throne, the soul looks up, and lo! the truth that it has worked for, clear, compact and solid, stands before it. No more struggle, no more doubt—is it not a time for a new song? What sun, breaking upon the darkness where the lost traveller wanders, deserves a greeting such as this? It seems as if we

could almost hear the delighted and triumphant mortal as he stands and sings out clear and strong and true his glory in the new-found truth, until it fills all heaven, and strikes against the jasper walls, and rolls back to lay its trembling waves of gratitude at the foot of the throne on which the great Truth-Giver sits.

The third strain which we can trace, by anticipation, in the new song of heaven is different from these with which it mingles, and adds a separate beauty of its own to complete their melody. The soul in heaven must sing not only for joy at Christ's victory and at its own graduation from struggle, but also for the continual delight of its Savior's realized presence, its perfect communion with Christ.

This is a lower and sweeter strain than the others. It does not mount into jubilant expression ; it sings itself, like all true affection, through the eyes and the whole face aglow with love, more than in articulate expressions of the lips. It has little to say ; and what it says, as very holy, it says in whispers and low, broken words. It is a song like a summer's day—quiet because so full of harmonious life. It sees Jesus entirely, and loves Him entirely, and is perfectly satisfied to rest in His affection.

To very many believers, to most believers doubtless, this thought of heaven is the most familiar—to be with Jesus. That is the description that the Christian hope has given of itself in every age, from

Stephen and Paul down to the saint who is waiting impatiently for release to-day. Thus every age has embodied in its Christ the highest idea of friendship that it has attained; and every separate believer has seen in the Christ he hoped to meet the satisfaction of his own peculiar longing in his Friend. One has looked for Christ the enlightener of ignorance, another for Christ the corrector of sin; another for Christ the consoler of sorrow, another for Christ the stimulator of energy, another for Christ the pure "lover of the soul," in that long-dreamed-of Savior whom he knew was waiting to lead him into heaven.

It seems to me that in this variety of Christian anticipation, there

is a great tribute to the essential divinity of the Gospel picture of our Lord. How is it that all sorts of men have been able to idealize the personality of Jesus of Nazareth, and find in Him a satisfaction for all their infinite variety of want? Does it not bear witness to a certain universality in the picture that the Bible gives us, which is nothing less than divine? Only the whole God can satisfy the whole man and all men. Can you conceive of any other of the great helpers of the human race being idealized with such infiniteness of help? When we see how the times and the minds which, mentally, morally, and spiritually, have had the largest and the keenest appetites, have been perfectly

satisfied with the anticipation of a heaven in which they should see Jesus and be with Him, must we not own that there was in His earthly life some suggestion of this mysterious and divine abundance which has gathered around it, and which mankind has found in it?

When we speak of this part of the joy of heaven, — joy in communion with Christ, — that part of the description of the new song that none can learn but they who have been redeemed becomes peculiarly intelligible. It has passed into a region where only the personal experience can follow it, the region of most intimate personal companionship and love. None but those who love Christ can rejoice and sing for His presence. Nay more than this,

—since each redemption is a separate and peculiar thing, since each redeemed soul passes through its experience of grace, a new feature enters here into the singing of the new song, —that, though the song will be but one because redemption is one, it must also be many because redemptions are so manifold. Each voice that sings will sing like all the rest, and yet sing differently. Each singer will sing to his own Savior. Each will remember his own calling, his own gradual conviction, especially the moment apart from all other Christians' holiest moments, when Jesus made the covenant with his individual soul. Each song will ring with peculiar memories of the paths, the open plains, the dark mountain passes,

when it was practised alone upon the upward journey.

And thus there will be forever in the new song of the redeemed that mingling of singleness with manifoldness, of combined unity with distinct personality, which is the beauty of all music and character and life.

These things, we know, must all be in the new song which Saint John heard, and which, if we trust in Christ and live to Him, you and I will hear some day. It is a wondrous song. It is the consummation and completion of the songs of earth. It is the groaning and travailing of the Creation suddenly bursting into music.

I hope our hearts have been lifted a little way above the earth while

we have been listening. I hope our cares and troubles, the things that worry us and vex us and make the earth seem dull and voiceless to us, have been swept aside a little while. Now let us come back to the earth again and see if we cannot bring the new song of heaven into the midst of it. Is it a thing entirely of the other world? Let us not think so. If we do think so and do not try to sing it till we get there, when we do get there we shall fail and be silent and ashamed. All the world is practising it,—in hoarse, unmusical and bitter tones very often, but still intently and truly. Wherever duty is being attempted, and truth sought, and love rendered, and prayer offered, and discipline accepted, there the new

song is being slowly, hardly learnt. If we can hear it, care and vexation are easy to bear because of the promise that is in our ears.

It is a wonderful and holy life—mysteriously holy most of all to him who lives it—when one feels himself day by day growing into the knowledge of the everlasting song. If we are always more and more glad whenever Christ gains any victory and is glorified anew, if we are being led up out of doubt to truth and out of restlessness to peace, above all if it is more and more our joy to get near and to keep near to the Lord,—then, though our lips and lives seem silent, they are shaping the melody of the new song and shall some day burst forth with it before the throne.

Some people's religion has very little song about it, new or old. It wails and groans. True religion sings here, and will sing more hereafter. Distrust your religion unless it is cheerful, unless it turns every act and deed to music and exults in attempts to catch the harmony of the new life. "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds,"—that was David's exhortation. Blessed be our Christian faith that does not let us creep dolefully along the path, but turns each new advance into a new hymn of triumph, and bursts the walls of the narrow way with the triumphant voices of the pilgrims, and keeps before us always the promise of the new song before the throne!





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